

*Regional Forum on European Integration,  
Hotel Holliday Inn, Skopje, 15 March, 9.30*

**Address**

***Radmila Šekerinska, Deputy Prime Minister  
Government of the Republic of Macedonia***

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Ø On behalf of the Government and on my behalf, I would like to welcome you to Macedonia.
- Ø Just as the physical road to Thessalonica has to pass through Skopje; the political road to a successful Thessalonica (at least from our perspective) has to pass through the phase of joint analysis and regional debate.
- Ø Today is by no chance a good day for this exercise; it is a day of mourning, of sadness, of temporary defeat and our condolences go to the family of Prime Minister Dzindzic, our colleagues and people of Serbia.
- Ø But as they say, the long-range goals are important to keep us going after the defeats and the failures.
  
- Ø The Serbian Prime Minister Dzindzic was assassinated in times when he himself, many of us in the region, and in Europe, were seeking to bring hope and perspective. He was assassinated by those who want to keep the region isolated, chaotic, undemocratic and criminal.
- Ø It is crucial to show that they cannot succeed; they cannot destroy nor undermine our efforts for a different, European Balkan.
- Ø When you are burdened by the past, your primary role is to look into the future.
- Ø And this is what we have to do now for the Balkans. "We" meaning the responsible politicians in the Balkans and in Europe, together.
  
- Ø Our part of the job, the part of the politicians in the Balkans – together - is to show, at this very moment, that we can take over the responsibility, within our borders and across the borders in the region, to lead our nations towards Europe.
- Ø And what we expect from the politicians in the European Union is to show that they are prepared to be with us on this path, regardless of the shortcomings, regardless of the obstacles, regardless of the alibis.
- Ø The politicians of the Balkans have to make the change. But, in order to make this change, we need the European agenda as our internal agenda, as a support agent.
- Ø Instead of the hundreds of initiatives and projects, we need a structured process that will clearly lead to the Union and this has to be a stable and constant process.
  
- Ø The reality is massive unemployment, poor development and lack of perspective. We have thousands of young and unemployed people, who have to look for their personal agenda and personal achievement, anywhere, but not at home.

- Ø Far from pretending to give one diagnosis for all aches, I would still say that without addressing these crucial problems, we shall not be able to make a significant change in other fields.
- Ø The excuse that we are still “in transition”, that we are in a “post-conflict” period, that we are “reconstructing” will not do much good, if this period never ends, and if it does not bring us to another point.
- Ø I am not trying to use the call for shift in the policies of the European Union towards the Balkans to economic and social cohesion, a call that has lately been so loud, as a pretext for putting “political tasks” on the second plan.
- Ø It is more than clear that this will not be possible, and we, the Balkan politicians have to make clear that we do not want this.
- Ø What we really want is to get out of the labyrinth of never resolving issues, and to stay on the track of civilized political dialogue that leads to solutions.
- Ø And again, what we expect from the European Union is to apply consistently and univocally for the Balkans, the principles that it applies for itself.
  
- Ø In the process of integrating the Balkans into the Union we shall need a lot of technocratic work, development of consistent policies, instruments and mechanisms.
  - We need screening, because we are using remedies without really having the full diagnosis, and, you know, this can kill a patient.
  - We need TAIEX expertise and twinning opportunities available for us.
  - We need Community programmes that will open for SAA countries.
  - It has not been contested that the regional and national ownership of the integration process has to be strengthened. This has to be done by altering the concept of the assistance institution namely the European Agency for Reconstruction.
  - Even symbolically the name of the Agency (as well as the title of the CARDS programme) is connected to the past, not to the future. It associates with ruined houses to be repaired, not with European values to share and European institutions to create.
  - Turning to substance, we have to channel aid to economic and social cohesion. This corresponds to the wide spread basic concerns of the citizens – and these are now predominantly economic and social.
  - The political will of the Union to additionally engage in the region has to be confirmed with adequate resources (matching the pledges for the Eastern Enlargement) and long-term planning. In one of the hearings in the British Parliament, Commissioner Paten noted that the support for the Balkans exceeds all financial support of Asia and Latin America, but did not fail to mention that this is still below the annual sums spent for the enlargement process for Poland (and this was in 2001 when the amounts for the Balkan were actually higher).
  - What has to be brought to the forefront of assistance programs is the European perspective, the European integration efforts, the democratic institutions building, the market institutions building, the support of the approximation of legislation.

- What the people need is the feeling that they work together on something that is feasible, achievable and essentially European.

€# Allow me to spare few words on Macedonia.

€# 2003 will be a decisive year for Macedonia's future.

€# The Government is determined to:

- Deliver the obligations envisaged in the FA in a fast and efficient manner
- Act responsibly and adhere to the tight and restrictive Arrangement with the IMF, opening up possibilities for a more intense economic growth in 2004
- Provide results from the fight against corruption and organized crime through coordinated police work, transparency, disclosure of assets and continuous elimination of discretionary rights of public officials etc.
- By the end of 2003 to take full responsibility with regards to its security, by ending the successful NATO and EU military missions, providing the EU with a first and successful test for the Joint European Foreign and Security Policy

€# These goals are complicated, complex, sometimes contradicting; they will require enormous political sacrifices, going against the tide and having to deal with many new and old enemies, threatened by these policies.

€# We will face risks and failures, critical moments and loss of public support for some of them. And when we deliver, we will have a set of new challenges and problems to look after, equally demanding and equally difficult.

€# But, I agree: the measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year.

€# We are determined to turn the "difficult 2003" into a "successful 2003" for Macedonia.

€# Is this endeavour a responsibility primary for the Macedonian Government – Absolutely Yes!

€# Should we be only ones engaged in it – Absolutely No!

€# The only real remedy for traumatizing history and troubled present is a clear future and a defined vision.

€# The EU and the prospects for integration offer such a vision.

€# It is time to show to the people that we should and we can move on.

€# This is the time to move from stabilization to association.

€# What we need now is vision, partnership and confidence, both from our side and from the Union.

€# During the meetings that I have with EU colleagues and EU-member states colleagues, I have witnessed a lot of good will and positivity towards the region, but also some skepticism. And I can understand most of it.

- €# The core question that pops up constantly is: what happens if the EU engages in the accession of the region and then you don't perform? And this is legitimate.
- €# But, what is also legitimate is the fact that if the EU does not engage we will most certainly not perform.
- €# The Eastern Enlargement provides us with multiple examples of this: would all of the candidate countries that are about to join the Union in 2004 and 2007 really eligible for the start of the negotiations; weren't there risks that they might not perform well.
- €# Of course the risks were there and fortunately the EU provided faith and leadership.
- €# The fact that the negotiations started influenced their political and economic development. It changed their priorities, it focused their attention; it provided them with resources and guidance to pass through the most difficult periods and decisions.
- €# So, we should not undermine that our prediction (EU predictions) influence future events. And EU predictions (its courage and leadership) will influence Macedonia's future.
- €# We will be engaged in a two-way, interdependent process: we will ask for faith, energy, resources, EU will in return ask for compliance, responsibility, dedication.
- €# It will be up to both us and the EU whether this interdependency creates an upward or downward spiral.
- €# To be a Balkan politician or to deal with the Balkan as a politician and not be cautious – is irresponsible.
- €# But, to be a Balkan politician or to deal with the Balkan as a politician and not be optimistic – is impossible (suicidal).
- €# This is why, let me finish with the words of Chesterton:
- €# "I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in fate that falls on them unless they act."
- €# So, I invite you to act together in good faith.
- €# Thank you.